

# MEMORIALISM

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*The Death that is Your Own*

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## CHAPTER ONE: MEMORIALISM AND VITACENTRISM

Memorialism, as a term and as a system of belief, derives from the well-known Latin phrase, *Memento Mori*, meaning “remember that you must die.” There are some who misinterpret memento mori as referring to some object that reminds them of one who has died already, but this is incorrect. While such objects are indeed valuable to us in keeping vivid our recollections of the departed, it is crucial--the Memorialist maintains--to place our primary focus not on remembering the dead, but death itself, and specifically one’s own death--*the death that is your own*.

Death has been a central element in religion and philosophy since long before the beginning of recorded time, but Memorialism, while tracing its origins back to the first cave burials of the pre-civilized ages, is a product of and a response to our present age, answering to exigencies of thought, attitude, and belief that mark modern man as standing distinctly apart from his arguably more death-conscious forbears. Innumerable factors have conspired to bring these thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs about in the modern person, and as many as possible will be addressed in the pages of this book. The basic point of view that Memorialism has been established to oppose (or to present an alternative to) is that “death is an absolute evil that ought to be avoided, forgotten, euphemized, diminished, scandalized, and scorned.” Such is the prevailing modern opinion, manifested in a thousand ways throughout society, culture, and custom, and such is the perspective which Memorialism seeks to amend.

This prevailing modern perspective is what the Memorialist calls *vitacentrism*--the view that nature exists for the purpose of fostering and preserving life, and that death is therefore somehow unnatural or antithetical to nature. The vitacentrist will be likely to adamantly deny that this is his belief, saying that of course it is natural for living things to die. But in thought, he will look at

the fact of his own death and the deaths of those he loves, and find in them something of the unbelievable and profane. And in action, he will go on trying to live for as long as he can no matter how unnatural (i.e., medicalized and technologized) his mode and manner of living becomes. The vitacentrist sees death all around him but cannot relate to it as a presence already dormant within himself. He continually asks, in response to the dictum *memento mori*, “Why must I die?”

The Memorialist, contrarily, knows he must die and seeks tirelessly to engender within himself, as well as in the external elements of his existence, a mode of thought and belief that makes this fact of *his own death*--as well as death in general--not simply bearable, but precious, sacred, and revelatory. The Memorialist, in a word, lives *with death, in death, and for death*. It is not going too far, even at this early point, to say that the Memorialist wants to die, though it would be a mistake to automatically equate this desire with suicide, despondency, or apathy toward life. All it means is that the Memorialist strives to achieve a relationship with *his own death* that can only be perfected in the consummation. Thus in the Memorialist, the fear and detestation toward death that afflicts the vitacentrist, is transformed or transmuted into love, veneration, and hope.

In common with our earliest ancestors, along with most of the animal world, the vitacentrist lives in a world of perpetual terror, anxiety, and dread. If these feelings are not at all times swirling in his bosom, it is because he is in a state or at a stage in which life and death are of equally little value to him, or are imbued with an equal lack of meaning. This is often the condition of the young. They live life “on the edge” because death holds no actual reality for them: it is too distant and indistinct a concept. They must be shocked into a sudden--if very imperfect--awareness of it if they are to begin to think differently. The more mature vitacentrist, who has attained to such an awareness--or perhaps was never wholly without it--thinks in terms of caution and security, living and acting in such a way as to optimize his chances of surviving for as long as

possible in a state of relative and increasing comfort. Because our society operates more or less along industrial and hierarchical lines, in which the maintenance of order and the ability to make reliable predictions are of predominant concern, it is this latter type of vitacentrist individual that it mainly strives to create through the established mechanisms of education, organized religion, corporate structuring, commercialism, the legal system, policing, and institutionalized militarism. All of these things are consciously formulated for the purpose of keeping the individual *safe from himself*, i.e., safe from becoming *too individual*.

In saying this, it is not meant that individualism is at all discouraged in our society, at least not overtly. For most persons, the idea that they are capable of and responsible for defining their own identities and deciding their own destinies is integral to what has been immortally termed “the pursuit of happiness.” While each of us knows that there are millions of things beyond our control, and billions of other people over whom we have no influence, we still manage to entertain what is considered the healthy delusion that our lives are the product of personal choice, and that all choices are open to us. And that is why death, as it appertains to ourselves, remains alien and anathema to our daily thoughts and considerations. It comes (for most of us) without our choosing it, and is--in the final accounting--utterly beyond our control. We can avoid it, we can ignore it, we can attempt to forestall it, but we cannot control it. We can choose it if we wish, but few of us do, and that is a subject for later discussion.

Thus one of the first steps a Memorialist must take in adjusting himself or herself to the new (and authentic) death-centered reality is to begin making an honest and rigorous evaluation of to what degree and extent personal choice truly does decide the most important facets of his or her existence. In the first place, it need hardly be pointed out that, unless one is an adherent to particular beliefs regarding the transmigration of souls (and even then, only with qualifications),

the fact of one's having been born and henceforth preserved in life, prior to one's becoming self-sufficient, was never one's choice. It may not even have been one's parents' choice, although the act that anticipated it probably was. Fundamentally, then, we can say that we have as little choice about being alive as we do about being dead. How many of us, in an instant of rage against some unfairness perpetrated by our progenitors, have cried, "I never asked to be born!" This understanding of the involuntary nature of our mortal existence arrives early and is never quite shaken. Some would argue that the fact that we choose, when we are able, to go on living, is a tribute either to our malleability, our cowardice, or our stupidity. We will, it may be, visit such arguments in pages to come.

At any rate, from this unchosen act of procreation we are launched fairly directly into a world divided between choice and directive. We are sometimes our own authorities, and sometimes under the authority of others. When we are under the authority of others, it is sometimes because we authorize ourselves to be so, and sometimes because force deprives us of any other option. We speak of life itself being a force, and there are extreme moments for many of us when it seems that we are living in spite of ourselves--that the vital force within us is operating according to directives of its own, though consciously we have quite surrendered ourselves to the desire for a permanent and conclusive respite. We speak also of death being a force: a force within nature that initiates the process of decay and overtakes us when the physical (sometimes mental) processes cease upon which our life-force depends. For the Memorialist, it must be explained, it is occasionally of benefit to practice and promote a view of death as being essentially passive and benign, as being *that into which all life escapes and has its refuge*. As a rule, all that we fear is one or another manifestation of force. To start to see death as the opposite of force is likewise to see it as the opposite, rather than the source, of fear.

It is especially true in our modern world of pluralism and commercialism that we are born into an environment composed entirely of options, amongst which we are at every moment required to exercise our right and obligation to choose. Depending upon the tactics and philosophies employed by our guardians, the range and frequency of our choice-making, at least during our earliest years, is placed within greater or lesser degrees of limitation, corresponding to factors of permissibility and availability. An affluent child may have greater choice in his abundance of playthings, but lesser choice in the social quality of his playmates. The child of the ghetto may play with whomsoever he pleases, but may have practically no options or opportunities at all in the matter of obtaining a worthwhile education or finding legitimate work that will increase his so-called “quality of life.” As a result of these social, cultural, and economic vicissitudes, a great many of us will conclude at some point in life that our choices, such as they are, have been grievously limited by circumstance, and will wish for what is popularly called freedom. And on making that freedom, as we envision it, our pursuit, most of us will come, by a series of choices, to a new mode of life that, while not closely resembling that into which we were born, is nevertheless more defined by its boundaries and limitations than it is by its liberties.

Consider the self-imposed vegetarian, or the motorcycle gang-member, or anyone who absconds from the “mainstream” culture to “find himself” in a subculture that is in all ways more confining and constraining. It is the very definition of *definition* that renders restriction and adumbration the basis by which any person, place, or thing is defined. If, then, death is to be seen as the uttermost limit of life--that by which and within which all life is limited--then it is no great stretch for the Memorialist to recognize that he is more defined by his death than he ever was or could be by his life. How he relates and responds to *the death that is his own* forms the foundation of his character, philosophy, and habits.

The heart and essence of life is fear, and this is the quintessential dilemma of the vitacentrist. We hear in popular culture that we must not be “afraid to live,” which usually means that we ought not to quail at making choices the outcomes of which are doubtful, or the results of which are potentially contrary to our timorous natures. But a brief glance into the greater Nature from which we have largely separated ourselves immediately proves that the principle underlying all conscious and semi-conscious life is fear, and that most living beings spend almost all their waking time in a state of perpetual vigilance and alarm. The forager fears the winter and stores against it, taking care to conceal his store from other foragers like himself. The herbivore fears the carnivore and runs like mad even from things that have never posed him a threat before. The carnivore fears solitude and cleaves to his pack for safety and companionship. Even the reclusive jungle-cat starts at the footfall of the poacher. Birds land in sky-canceling flocks then scatter moments later at the slightest rustle. Every organ on the homely house-fly is delicately and unceasingly attuned to the descent of the swatter. The only animals--sharks, crocodiles, etc.--that do not cower and flee in continuous terror of anything and everything are those that are the most primordial and peerless bringers of death. The shark, the crocodile, is death itself, perfected in death when life was still in its infancy. There are human sharks and human crocodiles, and they are the most frightened of all men, kept awake at night by tormenting visions of retribution, retaliation, and punishment. Those who do not live in fear of the guilty live in fear of their own guilt. The vitacentrist is, above all else, a slave and devotee of fear.

There are those, among the vitacentrists, that, in the name of “living life to the fullest,” take up pastimes that seem to defy death and prove they do not fear it. There are some who perform perilous feats for a living, or in the public or government service, or for the love of publicity. Their reward, they claim, is the “rush” they experience upon seeming to approach life’s

precipice and peer, grinning, over it, into a chasm that is as deep and black and vacant to them as it is to any other man, more respectful of his distance therefrom. This “rush,” being a sudden injection of the chemical adrenaline, is itself an innate and involuntary response to imminent annihilation: the brain informing the body of the need to take immediate action, however desperate and instinctive, to preserve itself from death. This same chemical can eradicate pain in a wounded person, or cause an enraged person to kill without forethought. It is the life-force’s most primitive agent, a servant of the unconscious, replacing deliberation with reflex, circumspection with instinct. It tries to promote the survival of the organism by immobilizing its intellect. The thrill inherent in riding a roller-coaster consists first of allowing oneself to become an imbecile enough to climb into it, and second, of climbing back out with all but one’s stomach intact. Our ancestors needed no roller-coasters, parachutes, or stockcars. They had lions and lightning and marauders from over the mountains enough to thrill them for a lifetime, be that lifetime ever so brief.

If the essence of vitacentrism, as embodied in adrenaline, is fear, then the essence of Memorialism is contemplation, born not of approaching death in any crude physical sense, but of approaching it in an intellectual, spiritual, and even sentimental sense, in the spirit not of restless action, but of a tranquility possessed only by those for whom death is not a stranger to be shunned, but an intimate to be welcomed. By thinking about death and according it his full and--as much as possible--undivided regard, the Memorialist retraces the process of human self-development and self-consciousness back to its most ancient dawns, when man beheld the vacated body of his fallen tribesman and thought: *thus too shall I be*. When human beings--or the species that were to become human beings--began burying their dead, laying them in the clefts of caves, providing them with implements for another world, making totems and ritual objects of their bones, even eating them ceremonially, they were showing for the first time what all of us now know but still



struggle to make sense of: that death means something entirely different to humans than it does to anything else inhabiting our planet. We are the species that cares for its dead. We do not only *fear* death as other species do, we also care about it, concern ourselves with it, invest it with a significance that for many of us transcends earthly existence itself. Some of us, it is true, look at the corpse and see ephemerality and terminality. In this we are not altogether wrong. Others of us, however, look at the corpse and see eternity, and in this neither are we wrong. Death is of such an unknowable vastness as to contain and exemplify both. It is the end, the beginning, and the always. It is the secret of our most intimate selves, concealed forever within us, concealed by our deaths--by our corpses--from everyone else.

Possessing not (or declining to possess) the secret of his own death, the vitacentrist seeks to define and understand himself by possessing anything else he can. Life as a force exists to consume, and so does the vitacentrist. For him his possessions are his sense of self and security, and if not his possessions, his family, and if not his family, his employment, and if not his employment, his entertainment, and so on. Our lives--the lives into which we are put and the lives into which we put ourselves--are but small compartments; they can only contain so much before they burst asunder and lose all scope and definition, becoming again as empty as an untenanted grave. Thus it is for the man who has a wife but must take a mistress, who has a car but must buy a motorcycle, who has a house but must retain a summer residence, who has two children but must father a third. Thus a television in every bedroom, a mobile phone for every family member, two parents working two jobs each, holiday-themed neckties, self-help books equating financial achievement with spiritual enlightenment, cold cappuccino in a pop-top can, eating while walking, reading while driving, remote-controlled mattresses.... Life has outlived itself, overpopulated, overcrowded, over-scheduled, overdrawn, overwhelmed. This is where vitacentrism--the diabolical

compulsion to live for life itself, life defined as ownership, productivity, and progress--has brought us. We live empty lives having no time or thought for death, against and within which alone is meaning possible. Only in a world like this could Memorialism be necessary.

## CHAPTER TWO: MEMORIALISM AND RELIGION

Before proceeding to other subjects, we must first attempt to make clear for those to whom this is a point of paramount concern, the extent to which Memorialism may or may not be regarded as a religion, or, at the very least, a system of religious philosophy. It must at once be understood that religion--its definition, its functions, its range of influence within any given society--is very far from being a universally agreed-upon concept. The forms religion assumes, the ways it is observed, and the sorts of people who observe it to a greater or lesser degree, vary so broadly across regions, cultures, and traditions, that the adherents of one religion would find it problematic to recognize the observers of another as being "religious" at all. Therefore the question of whether Memorialism is a religion depends almost entirely on the prejudices and preconceptions of whomever is doing the asking. It will be useful, then, for us to elucidate a set of criteria which most modern persons would consider indispensable in deciding whether or not any given combination of beliefs and practices can be said to constitute a religion.

First, let us agree that a religion must have a deity, a number of deities, or--the idea of deity being itself less than perfectly clear--some supernatural entity or entities that transcend the mortal realm and are venerated and propitiated to act on humanity's behalf. In some cases this is unmistakably clear. Christianity, to begin with the most obvious, generally accepts the existence (or hyper-existence) of a tripartite deity made up of God the Father, God the Son (i.e., Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit, which orthodox theology hold to be three equal components of a single God, which operate in separate capacities, and are--in typical practice--invoked at different times, sometimes singularly and sometimes all together. For the Muslim and the Jew this idea of a Holy Trinity is not only difficult, but blasphemous and absurd, for it presupposes that the powers

of deity are not unified within the Godhead, but are delegated and divided between three distinct attributes, each sharing equal status with the one known simply as “God.” It is the sort of thing that makes one’s head hurt until one finally resolves to accept it without further inquiry, and it is, in the Christian tradition, nothing more or less than a fairly desperate doctrinal solution to a problem created in the gospels, but not resolved by them, and nowhere present either in the Torah or the Qur’an, where the insistence upon a single, undivided, and absolute deity is explicit and (for the most part) beyond dispute. To bring the matter before a polytheist, such as an Indian Brahmin, would induce the opposite confusion, because he would have--depending on the sophistication of his understanding--difficulty comprehending how a god could be both one god and several gods at once. For his sake, it may be necessary to surmise that it is something akin to every subordinate god being an emanation of the eternal and original Atman, or to suggest that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are comparable to (but not the same as) the various avatars in which Krishna has been incarnated. Throughout history, various innovators have attempted to reduce or consolidate polytheistic religions into monotheistic ones, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. In ancient Egypt, King Akhenaten tried to force all of the local temples to divert their devotions from regional deities to that of the sun god Aten, with minimal ultimate success. The Egyptians remained polytheists until converted first to Coptic Christianity, and then to Islam. The largely polytheistic Romans, subsumed at last by the Catholic Church, were compensated by a pantheon of saints that remains to this day and continues to expand, with old saints being forgotten as new ones are canonized. All of this is of course quite abhorrent to the protestants, for whom three gods in one are quite enough to keep one busy.

Animistic and pantheistic religions present a similar quandary to the march of monotheism, in that monotheists prefer to believe that the one true God stands *over* everything, while animists

and pantheists partake of the view that God is more of a universal spirit that resides and manifests *within* everything, inextricable from creation itself. For this reason, monotheists (and many polytheists, at least in former times) have a habit of envisioning a time when God will show his power by indiscriminately destroying--and subsequently recreating--everything He sovereignly brought into being. A pantheist, on the other hand, is more likely to assume that everything is basically self-sustaining and self-regenerating, and will go on forever in one form or another.

Applying this first criterion to Memorialism, we must ask, Does Memorialism recognize (and furthermore, does it worship) a deity? The question may be answered very simply, but not without raising a plethora of new questions in its place: questions which must be addressed singularly, and all of them probably not in the present work. It has been stated in the previous article that Memorialists believe in death, holding it as supreme in their consciousnesses and supreme in nature. Does this make death a god, or the God? In the course of Memorialism's taking shape, several potential answers have presented themselves to this query:

1. There is no God as such, if God is to be understood as an active and conscious participant in human affairs, manipulating and altering them according to His will. Death, being the source, possessor, and destination of all life, is therefore not a god in the intercessory or interventional sense--meaning its will (if it can be said to have a will) cannot be affected by any human action--though it is venerated *like* a god in that all of the Memorialist's considerations and meditations are directed toward death, and specifically, *the death that is his own*.
2. There was once a God, from which all visible and invisible creation sprang, but He is now either absent, dormant, or dead, and has left death in His place to preside over the fate and affairs of humanity and all living things. If God is dead, it stands to

reason that He killed Himself (since nothing else could have done it), in the process affirming that death was superior even to Him.

3. There is a God presently in place, and death is His viceroy and regent on earth.

There is no way to understand god but by understanding death, and no way back to God but by dying. God cannot be understood by life because life, being impermanent, can only be understood within the confines of death, which is eternal, and is therefore like unto God. God has nothing to do with how, when, where, or why anybody dies--nor, in any practical sense, does death. Death chooses nothing; it is the choice already made by the existence of life itself. Hence, all that man chooses--to die or not to die, to kill or not to kill--being made within life, is for all intents and purposes *always* a choice of death, moving them or another person at a greater or lesser velocity toward death, but always ultimately relating to the only true concern, which is *the death that is (or shall be) their own*.

While these possibilities appear to be different and potentially suggestive of three divergent interpretations of Memorialism, in fact they are the same, and need never be definitively reconciled. One may, as a Memorialist, find oneself believing one or another of them for a period, or at any given time, depending on what circumstances surrounding and within you seem to dictate. The Memorialist will not himself say that death is his god, simply because the word “god” is too laden with tangled complexities and historical detritus to be of any practical use. It means something different to everyone who uses it. Death, for the Memorialist, can mean only two things: death in general, as applied to all life, and death specifically as applied to oneself alone. And only the second of these is really valid, since the only death we can ever truly know is *the death that is our*

*own.*

Second among our criteria for whether or not something may be termed a religion is *prayer and ritual* as well as--in most cases but not in all--the taking of a *sacred vow or creed*. Without these, no religion can be. True, there are many persons who go about in our society saying that they “believe in God,” or “believe in Something,” or are “still basically Christians,” or “are very spiritual people,” but if they do not pray and they do not participate in regular, prescribed rituals, they are not religious, and they have no religion. The word “religion” comes from the Latin verb “to bind,” and in praying, performing rituals, and taking and repeating vows or creeds, the religionist binds himself to his religion and proves himself in the truest sense an adherent thereof. To be a “believer” is simply not enough. The Christian, therefore, has his prayers--those prescribed to him and those composed extemporaneously by himself--which he says either regularly or irregularly according to his inclination. He has his rituals, such as going to church, crossing himself, kneeling or clasping his hands, invoking God or Jesus at crucial junctures or in times of uncertainty, reading his Bible, and so on. He has taken vows or creeds in the form of baptism, confirmation, or the penitent’s prayer, and these set him apart from the non-Christian. The “Christian” who does not pray, does not go to church, does not read his Bible, and does not reaffirm his baptism in the form of a creed, is not in fact a Christian, though he may continue to direct his life according to some of the moral principles which are codified in Christianity and, indeed, shared by most other formal or institutionalized religions.

The question facing the Memorialist is, does he wish to be *religious* in his adherence to Memorialism, or is it sufficient for him simply to *believe* that Memorialism is essentially correct in the ideas that it professes and represents? Again, it can go either way. Religion exists and has

always existed for the plain reason that some people seem to need it in order to give their lives meaning, order, and context. Those who do not have a religion as traditionally defined tend to find their religion in mundane things, such as work, hobbies, addictions, social attachments, or intellectual pursuits. These are not the same as religion, but they basically stand in place of and to some degree compensate for the religion that the non-religionist lacks. The “religion” of the average vitacentrist in our time is typically one of staying alive and seeking personal pleasure in doing so. They work to earn their leisure, which they take so seriously--having earned it through toil--as to turn it into its own kind of work. They cultivate social connections and social status, along with all its material trappings, predicating their identities upon the way in which they are accepted and perceived by others. They worry constantly that they are “not really living,” and struggle fruitlessly to derive the answers from life that life itself has posed, never considering for a moment that life could be *nothing* but the problem and that death could offer *everything* in terms of a solution. They are locked in a life that is continually escaping from them into a void of senselessness and a sorrow they dare not speak, for fear of offending the other vitacentrists to whom they look for their examples of “true living.” Having made a religion of life, they present for those with eyes to perceive that the ultimate aim, object, and origin of religion is and has always been *death*. The reason that we, among all other species, are the only religious animal is because we are the only animal that knows we will die: that sees death as an objective and inevitable reality, and must find some way of making it real for himself.

The answer, then, is that Memorialism can be approached both religiously and non-religiously, and that it amounts to largely the same thing in the end. As long as the Memorialist is perpetually and singularly focused on finding *the death that is his own*, there is no wrong way of getting there. A Memorialist may, in fact, remain faithful to any already existing religion, and



merely use Memorialism as a means to arriving at a deeper, older, more authentic truth than that which is available to his vitacentric compeers, who cannot take their religions seriously precisely because they cannot bring themselves to think seriously about death, and especially not about their own deaths. A Memorialist Christian will be a superior Christian, a Memorialist Buddhist will be a superior Buddhist, a Memorialist Muslim will be a superior Muslim. And for this reason, a religious Memorialist may, in some important respects, be a superior Memorialist. Prayers, rituals, vows and creeds all serve an important function in reminding the religionist who he is, helping him to know what to do, and maintaining him upon an unwavering path toward a firmly established, stationary goal. They are guides to inner development that forestall the waywardness and indecision of the ego and permit the practitioner to participate in the realm of sacred tradition, which transcends individual mortality, and thus brings them closer to death. But this is, quite necessarily, the harder of the two paths. It is wrong to think that because the religionist is able to adopt forms, beliefs, and practices already devised by someone else, he is liberated from the responsibility of thinking for himself. For the modern man, more than ever before, acceptance of tradition means denial of the self, and the ego will fight tenaciously against it. As soon as one becomes aware that the only path to truth and meaning is the pursuit of *the death that is one's own*, one is accepting the unavoidable necessity of discipline. Let your mind waver for an instant, and it will return to life, and become again life's captive. The vastness of death will shrink to an afterthought, the nearness of death will fade into the distance, and the comforts of death will be submerged in trepidation, anxiety, and cold, empty horror.

A difficulty does arise in that most popular religions, in their desire to appeal to a world full of vitacentrists, have made life into the ultimate good, and, without discarding death absolutely, have rendered its name into a pejorative, the opposite of what is wholesome and desirable. In

stating that all religion owes its existence to death, it must be acknowledged that it is the *fear* of death, not the wish to understand it, which has become the principal impetus behind many if not most religions that are widely practiced today. The minister reads of eternal “life” while tossing his handful of earth into the grave over which he speaks. The promises of an afterlife or a resurrection are employed to distract adherents from that ultimate concern which, if attended to earnestly, would be the very salvation they seek: salvation from fear and the emptiness of life. But if one were to search the lives of the saints and the martyrs, the prophets and the revelators, one would see immediately that their thoughts were *constantly* on death, and that it is from this perennial concern--this obsession, even--that they derived their meaning, their purpose, and their objective. This is true also of the immortal poets and artists of every kind, whose names have lingered while their bones dissolved. Within the context of his religion and his fellow religionists, a Memorialist may be mistaken as morbid, even heretical, just as a non-religious Memorialist may be dismissed as morose and detached, though he be as cheerful about death as the vitacentrists around him pretend to be about life. All that Memorialism can promise is ease of mind and ease of spirit; nothing else will be easy.

The third attribute that nearly all religions share is the existence of a sacred ceremonial space, an *axis mundi*, which, though being located on earth, is spiritually separate from it.

Depending on the religion such a space can range from being something so simple as a rock or a tree, or a little shrine in the corner of a private home, or something so majestic as a basilica.

Whatever form it takes, it forms a nexus not necessarily between heaven and earth (because not every religion subscribes to a heaven), but between this world and the next, the world of matter and the world of spirit. Generally it is a gathering place, where practitioners convene to worship,

perform rituals, or sacrifice as a unit; sometimes it is known and sacred only to a single person, a place of refuge from the profane world where he can be alone with his god or gods. Only truly nomadic peoples may lack such a place, or they may have several such places that they return to cyclically; in any cases such peoples tend to have religious ideas and practices that little resemble those of sedentary races. Like everything else, they take their religion with them wherever they go, as the Jews did during the diaspora. In such events, it is often portable religious objects which take the place of permanent religious spaces. An example of this is the Arc of the Covenant, which was borne through the desert until finding its home in the tabernacle. Whatever the culture and whatever its setting, man has, it seems, always found it necessary to keep the religious space (sacred) distinct and apart from the secular space (profane), in acknowledgment that when one enters into religious practice, one is entering into another world, just as the dead are said to enter another world upon dying. A church is nothing more or less than a mass grave for the still living, where the soul attempts to overreach its mortal bounds and breathe the air of divinity. That burial grounds, until recently, were so often attached to churches says much about the particular relationship Christians specifically have (or once had) with their dead, whom they regard as mere sleepers awaiting their resurrection and judgment. Most other religions keep the ritual centers of the living separate from the resting places of the dead, either out of a healthy fear of the dead, or a distaste for the corpse as an empty and contaminating thing, or a pious notion that the dead deserve a place of their own. Still other cultures made a habit of burying their ancestors under their own homes, to have them always near. The dead (so long as they are *our* dead) are always and everywhere some kind of sacred, and once the living (profane) thing is rendered sacred in death, there is always a question of how best to handle it. Thus most cultures have two religious spaces: those used by the living, and those belonging to the dead.

In our culture, we have a way of making everything that death touches sacred. A plaque goes up on the wall of the house where a famous person died, or it is turned into a museum. A cross appears behind the guardrail where a deadly car crash took place, or flowers and candles on a corner where a young man was shot. Public parks are turned into military memorials in the aftermath of a war; ornamental edifices and name-covered slabs arise on the sites of mass tragedies. Since the Civil War, when the number of dead became so overwhelming that local churchyards could no longer contain them, great, sprawling cemeteries have been established, stretching for acres upon acres, becoming sacred spaces unto themselves, independent of any house of worship. Meanwhile the bones and other relics of dead saints are housed in cathedrals, churches, monasteries, and chapels, making the sacred places even more sacred by their presence. We are closer to death and more aware of death than our daily lives would have the disinterested observer believe: we accord it an enormous amount of attention and grant it terrific amounts of space, which cynics and atheists complain could be put to more profitable use for the living. This is not because we have to, because the dead themselves demand it, but because something in us--something visceral and primordial--wants to do our best for the dead, to show them respect and honor, and thereby do the best for ourselves, as an example to those who will one day bury us. We bury our loved ones as we would ourselves be buried. It is the Golden Rule, brocaded in black.

If we claim that it is possible and perhaps even preferable for a Memorialist to be religious in his Memorialism, what can the Memorialist claim as his sacred space, as his *axis mundi*? The most intuitive response, already predicted by the reader, is the graveyard, where the dead repose amongst their monuments and the indifferent charms of an indifferent Nature. I have spent more hours in my life than I can number in graveyards of every size and description, reveling in the silence and attempting to absorb whatever silent lessons the dead have to teach me. As the years go

on, however, and the truths of Memorialism become clearer to me, I have come to think of graveyards not so much merely as depositories for the numerous and ever-accumulating dead, but as preservers of mortal bonds and earthly relationships, with husbands buried alongside wives, children at the feet of parents, families dominating entire sections, with families linking to families linking to families.... Though the rural and urban necropolis is indeed full of the dead, it is itself a monument to life, an effort to make the living feel as if the dead are not wholly departed, but can still be visited, and their earthly names still read. Moreover, without oneself possessing family or some other close connection in any given cemetery, one can only ever be an interloper upon the lives and relationships of strangers, and this itself is an estrangement; it can push us away from death rather than drawing us closer. If you were musing over the headstone of someone's great-grandmother, and her descendent came over with a book of genealogy in one and a bunch of flowers in the other, only one of you would belong there, and the other would be an intruder--even upon public space. In other words, the grave of the great-grandmother can only be truly sacred to her progeny, not to you.

It may be that one day, perhaps sooner rather than later, Memorialism will attain to such a degree of popular adherence (though I doubt it will ever be really popular) that Memorialists will begin gathering together to share together their love of death, and compare with one another what has been revealed to them regarding *the deaths that are their own*. But there is no guarantee of this, and it is just as likely that what Memorialists do exist will be solitary in nature and disposition, and will prefer to remain so. It is for them to create their own sacred spaces, and to use what devices seem most proper to them for demarcating them as sacred.

Here is an advantage the Memorialist has over most other religionists. For him, death is ever-present and always as near to him as his hair to his flesh and his flesh to his bones. It is, indeed,

already within him, already working, already drawing him in. Therefore it stands to reason that there need not be any strict separation between his regular living space and the space that he employs for meditating on and venerating death. Indeed, it is incumbent upon him that he make death fully welcome in his living space, since, as a Memorialist, he now understands it to be his dying space as well. Let every moment that you spend by yourself be sacred to death, and let the place where you go to seek your solitude be sanctified to death's image (whatever you conceive that to be) and death's name. And most of all, let it be consecrated to the continuous memory of *the death that is your own*.

### CHAPTER THREE: MEMORIALISM AND THE AFTERLIFE

Archaeological evidence tells us that the belief in some form of afterlife or posthumous continuation of existence has been with humanity since before it could be recognized as, purely speaking, human, and that the preparation of the dead for an afterlife in the process of burial is among the oldest—and probably *the* oldest—demonstration of religious thought and expression. Somewhat later on in the petroglyphic records, humanity appears to have advanced into petitioning the gods or the spirits for success in the hunt, virility, etc., through ceremonial dances and ritual art, but the best we can tell is that death was the first great mystery, and the dead were themselves the first objects of what we can now countenance as religious attention. The reason for this is easy enough to suppose, although it is hazardous to state with any definitive certainty what was passing through the minds of our earliest forbears. Death was the first Great Mystery, and it remains to us the first Great Mystery, and for that matter, the last Great Mystery as well. Even though early man was familiar with death as it appertained to the rest of nature, he would not have recognized the life that manifested in animals and plants as the same which animated his fellow human beings (although the ritualized burial of dogs and other animals was not wholly unknown to him.) A person who at one moment was walking, talking, and participating in social life would all at once take ill and begin to fade, or would suffer a wound and commence to expire, and then suddenly vanish into an impenetrable sleep, never to reawaken. His or her physical body would quickly begin to show signs of decay that were not present in the living person, suggesting that some vital element that once held him or her together, so to speak, has taken flight and left the corporeal person empty. But empty of what, and to whence did it fly? Was there anyone or anything to meet it when it reached its destination on the other side of life? How would it fend for itself in its new spiritual or celestial or subterranean environment? Questions like these must have

loomed large in the prehistoric mind, like the dancing shadows that towered along the cave walls while the evening fire burnt itself into embers. Dimly conscious of his own consciousness, early man would have found it inconceivable that the consciousness of his loved one was simply snuffed out with the perishing of the flesh, and moreover, that his *own* consciousness could ever come to an absolute end and vanish into nothingness. It was too real, too individual, too ever-present, and too intangible to be subject to the normal laws of physical nature. It had to go *somewhere* when the body could no longer hold it.

Such speculations, owed entirely to the mystery of death, formed the cornerstone of human self-consciousness; the ability to see oneself as an individual among individuals, not merely as a contributing function of a larger social unit or organism, as so many animals and plants seemed to be. Interestingly enough, as humanity expanded its influence over the world and progressed toward civilization, the role of the individual in maintaining a society comprised of more than one family unit and tribal group took a toll on the self-awareness of the individual, allowing him to conceive of an afterlife in which individuality as such could potentially be lost. Many more advanced cultures came to envision the continued existence of the deceased person as bleak and nebulous, where all or most traces of what made a person special while on earth were stripped away, reducing him to what we now call a “shade,” or a shadow of what he once was. Only the rulers and the royalty, the heroes and demigods, whose individual names and exploits could be committed to record and to history, were accorded the privilege of remaining solitary and intact after passing out of life, thus continuing to dominate the thronging souls of the common dead the way they had done among the plebeian living. As once-egalitarian and classless cultures coalesced into city-states and nations, the realm of the dead took on the same hierarchical character as that which was familiar to the living. The slave, the laborer, and the artisan could not possibly see



himself living, like his kings and potentates, in fellowship with the gods, when all priestly titles and duties were the sole dominion of the rulers and nobility. From this arose the possibility of something like heaven and something like hell: a paradise for the royal dead, who lived forever in luxury and tranquility, and a perdition for the inferior classes who, if they survived death at all, did so only to go on serving and scraping as they had always served and scraped before. For the privileged classes arose a fear that the gods would not accept them upon their arrival on the nether shore; for the lower classes arose the fear that their insignificance on earth would either doom them to non-existence, or to a continued existence of perpetual servitude and suffering. A historical record left by kings, conquerors, and the elevated priestly classes have left us with a glorified and rarefied picture of afterlives that were intended only for those with prestige enough to enter and enjoy it. We can say without doubt that for the majority of humanity, for the majority of history, those who took time to wonder after an existence proceeding upon the temporal one did not venture to imagine an improvement in their condition or status therein, and in all likelihood would have been glad for the assurance that nothing awaited them but nothing at all.

Only in the most unusual of cases, like those of the Tibetan Buddhists, the dynastic Egyptians, and the Greeks as represented in Homer, are we ever offered anything like a clear and somewhat concrete conception of the life to come. That of the Tibetans, as put forth in their *Bardo Thodol*, is so bewildering and multifaceted as to portray the post-death experience as something more like a prolonged and maddening nightmare, filled with inscrutable archetypal symbolism and demons of every description, terminating only at the point when the soul reenters the terrestrial realm by discharging itself into an awaiting newborn, and so never really escaping life's suffocating confines. The Egyptians, with their *Book of Coming Forth by Day*, left those who could afford it with instructions on getting through the various pylons and guardian beasts in order

to successfully enter the underworld, but were decidedly obscure in their details regarding the specifics of the ethonic terrain for those who succeeded—suggesting by the title, and by the furnishing of their burial chambers, that it partly entailed a periodical return to the world above. With their Charon and their Cerebus, their Styx, Tartarus, Erebus, and the Elygian fields, the Greeks mapped out a geography of a Hades in which, as with most other cultures, only the most illustrious of persons enjoyed any type of succor or the retention of personality. For most of these cultures, the Mesopotamian included, their stories regarding the nature and appearance of the underworld were concerned almost exclusively with mortals who dared to enter it prematurely in order to bring somebody or something else out, indicating that it was not a place to be envied or sought after by the living. For our ancestors, it seems, the dread of death was to be matched only by the dread of whatever was to come thereafter. For them, the prevailing modern view of man as the Natural Optimist did not hold.

With the coming of Dante in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Western view of the Hereafter was transformed forever, only to be mitigated nearly half a millennium later by the sweeter visions of Swedenborg and the elusive prognostications of the Spiritualists. Inspired by a now-obscure canon of medieval visionary accounts provided by saints and monastics, and taking practically nothing from the Bible itself, Dante perpetuated the idea of the other world as being starkly hierarchical, but ranked according not to social status, but to personal virtue. Moreover, he lodged in the imagination of the Westerner the concept that a man's immortal fate, and the nature of his punishment, could be decided not only by a multiplicity of sins, but by one prevailing sin that was either repeated throughout life, or committed in a more or less spectacular fashion only once. Under his pen, men became devils on earth, each exemplifying one vice above all others, and each damned to unique and sometimes personalized torments metaphorically inspired by the vice itself.

Unintentionally on Dante's part, and surprisingly akin to Tibetan and Brahministic conceptions of the transmigrational experience, the *Comedia* gave license to the figuration that what awaited man after death was as much a production of his own unconscious ingenuity as it was a sentence pronounced from On High. The idea that the living man was continuously “making the bed” that he would then have to “lie in” for eternity to some degree undercut the Gospel notion that the only truly important decision a person ever made was whether or not to accept Jesus as Messiah. Some sins, it seemed to say, rolled off of us like water off a duck-feather; some, or one in particular, stuck to us like tar and shaped an infinite diversity of self-made hells. Whatever else this did to terrify the guilty-minded and edify the vindictive, it allowed, in the late-Medieval and Renaissance mind, for the resurgence of the notion of the individual, heterogenous death—a death and an afterlife intended for one person and one person only.

At the same time, the Western world was swept by a series of apocalyptic plagues that in their way presented quite an opposite picture. With the pestilence striking with equal degrees of devastation the homes of poor and rich alike, the alehouses of the unrepentant and the convents of the saints, infants in their cradles and elders in their chairs, death was re-envisioned again as the Great Equalizer, for whom neither earthly nor heavenly hierarchies held any meaning or assurance. Heaped on carts and dumped either into mass graves or atop fuming conflagrations, death became personified in the character we still recognize as the Grim Reaper, dressed as a friar, wielding the scythe of a field-hand, and holding sway over all creation, the dead themselves lapsed into blank anonymity, a faceless vision of universal horror and universal judgment. Even those who were employed in scooping the dead up and wheeling them away wore beaked masks that gave them the appearance of so many identically-plumaged, hungrily flocking carrion-crows. If many-mansioned Heaven or multi-tiered Hell had a special place prepared for each of this nameless multitude, it was

not too much for pre-moderns to think that we are more properly individuals in death than we are permitted to be in life: that a living nobody could become a dead somebody, his vices or virtues being numbered and recognized by God Himself, the Original of all originals. What a refuge was there now in escaping from a life of thankless serfdom and unabated terror! The last truly were made first! The meek truly did inherit the earth—or at least the earth that was to come.

Today practically no consensus exists among those still subscribing to an afterlife as to what form or forms that afterlife may take. Most Christians, even, have given up trying to articulate any clear idea of what Heaven and Hell are actually like, other than those who still see Heaven as a crystalline city paved in gold and Hell as an endless lake of unquenchable fire. Faced with the question of how an individual born into temporality could endure any one kind of existence for all eternity, Christian and non-Christian alike must shrug and confess his ignorance. And still, people who had never thought of an afterlife before make eulogies at the funerals of their loved ones, saying with all positiveness that they “know so-and-so is up there, looking down at us all.” (We crane our necks and peer warily into the corners, behind the flying buttresses and up on the choir loft.) People speak of feeling the “presence” of their wives and husbands, fathers and mothers, grandparents, and so forth around them when they are in a particular room, or humming a particular song. The great atheistic proclamation, “When you're dead, you're dead, and that's all you are,” is still met with a shudder by all but the most steely-hearted puritans of the post-religious age. To the modern denizen of the Western world, and to the vitacentrist especially, death is stranger than ever, the afterlife is vaguer than ever, and life is more frightening than ever, because the only authorities we countenance as such are those with something to sell and an exciting way to sell it. The words “prophet” and “profit” have effectively lost all distinction.

It is not, alas, the province of Memorialism to sell anything, including a new (or even an old)

rendition of the afterlife. The author of this present volume may have his own theory, or may have forsaken all theories, but what the theory is, or whether one is entertained by him, will not be told here, or sold elsewhere. The all-important and all-consuming task of the Memorialist is to find *the death that is his own*, not to speculate and conjecture upon the existence (notice I do not say “life”) that may or may not follow. To do this, in fact, is a monumental distraction and almost in itself a sin. The Memorialist is, of course, not without morals, not without ethics, not without a sense of right and wrong, justice and injustice; but he knows these to be functions and facets of earthly, mortal life, involving human society and the world of the living exclusively. In the same way that death is neither “good” nor “bad,” the dead are neither “good” nor “bad” once their participation in the social order of the living has come to an end, along with whatever consequences or repercussions may have resulted from their corporeal lives and the choices they made whilst living them. We neither fear “final judgment” nor take comfort in it, knowing for certain only that our lives and our memories will be judged by those who remain living after our deaths. If we seek, while on earth, to do as much good and as little harm as possible (and we most definitely do so seek), it is because we are living persons who care for the living persons around us, not because we hope that by adopting a self-sacrificial style of life we will be apportioned some great reward in the other world, which somehow “makes up” for all the sacrifices we made on earth. One of the chief goals of the Memorialist, in fact, is to realize and demonstrate that when little is required of others, little is sacrificed of the self. The less one endeavors to fill one's life and conquer boredom by making oneself always needlessly busy, the more time one is able to devote to assisting and comforting others. The less one cares about how much one has, the more able he is to give without fretting. A property-poor but always beneficent Memorialist leaves behind (for the most part) happy relatives who remember him well for the good he did while living; not resentful ones who will

feud and squabble over his material legacy when he dies. He does not ask who is “deserving” of his help and kindness, he does not lay conditions upon the help and kindness he bestows, but he is as helpful and kind as he can be while in life, and will be remembered as such in death by those who count such qualities among the virtues. But even this is not the concern of the Memorialist—how he will be remembered, what “mark” he has made on the world. For the Memorialist is always occupied with making himself ready for *the death that is his own*, and ridding himself of everything—every possession, every distraction, every addiction and vice—that could make death a worry and life a senseless burden. He does only what brings him peace, and what brings him peace is bringing peace to others.

One may well ask of the Memorialist, “What if there *is* no life after death? What, then, was it all for? What was it worth? Doesn't that mean that nothing really matters in the end?” I too struggled and debated with myself about these question when I made the decision to let death simply be death, without requiring either something or nothing from it, except for death itself. What I eventually realized, after much wringing of hands and pacing of floors, was that while I am in life, I am in time, and can only think as a being in time. And as a being in time, I am always looking in three directions at once: backwards, forwards, or downwards (at where I am now.)<sup>1</sup> But since I have the capacity to look forward, which is peculiarly pronounced in human beings, I am always living in a state of expectation, always anticipating what will come next, and what I will do when it comes. This capacity is a condition of my mortal existence, and it serves me well in my mortal existence, when it is not taken too far and allowed to become a state of perpetual apprehension. It does not serve me, however, when it comes to death, which, while entering into time and involving itself in time, exists outside of time and takes me out of time with it. It is not

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1 A fourth direction exists, Upwards, which allows me to look at things entirely beyond myself (i.e., things ultimate and transcendent); but since not all people seem to acknowledge this direction or pay it any thought, I do not list it as being a universal quality.

only that I do not have the right to require of death that it participate in the “before” and “after” states that define our temporal existence, it is that I do not have the ability to do so without remaining firmly planted in time, and therefore outside of death. And everything that takes me outside of death must absolutely and necessarily be in error. As a Memorialist I am and must be always “in death.”

The question, “What was it all for,” is one that occurs to us only because we are historical creatures who must see everything in the light of history. This is true even of those who have no interest or particular knowledge of history and consider it an enormous bore. Generally those who have no appreciation of history are instead interested only in the novel, without realizing that it is precisely the novelty of a thing, person, or event that makes it, properly speaking, historical. We are not disserved by our historical faculties; they allow us to think on a grander scale, to find significance in what was done before us and to see what we do as being potentially significant in the same way. It inspires us to inspire others. But we must never forget that *death has no history*. Most of the persons who made history are dead, but they are not death. History often involves the deaths of one or of many, but all that is meaningless when brought into the light of *the death that is your own*. From history we can learn nearly everything about life, but we can learn nothing of essential value to ourselves about death. As Memorialists it is our duty and our prerogative to always remember not *just* the dead, not *just* death itself, but *the death that is our own*—the only death that we will truly ever know.

## CHAPTER FOUR: MEMORIALISM AND MORALITY

A Memorialist, when asked what it is he believes in, is as likely as anything to reply (if he be the candid sort, and if the inquirer be prepared to receive an explanation), “I believe in death.” To the ears of our contemporaries, this may at first seem an astonishing response, despite the fact that we *all* believe in death, knowing as we do that it happens all around us, and there is for no one any getting around *it*. But our contemporaries, especially among the vitacentrists that form the public majority, death is only the negation of life, and cannot therefore be believed in the way life can. For the vitacentrist, the Memorialist has just uttered the equivalent of “I believe in nothing,” which is the same as saying, “I don't believe in anything.” This is not, of course, at all what the Memorialist intended to say, yet nonetheless, it is what the vitacentrist hears, and the Memorialist, to this manner of thinking, is now a self-professed nihilist. And until Memorialism is better understood by at least a number of society's more largely informed members, he must prepare himself always to encounter the most austere disapprobation and obdurate opposition to so unambiguous a statement of his fundamental belief. It is hoped that the following paragraphs will provide the Memorialist reader (or the reader on his way to becoming a Memorialist) with such answers as are necessary to pacify a vitacentrist interlocutor and make the pronouncement “I believe in death” comprehensible to the incredulous.

The paramount difficulty to be encountered by the Memorialist is that, upon being first dismissed (in the mind of the vitacentrist, who at any rate probably doesn't know he is a vitacentrist, or that any such category of person exists) as a frothing nihilist, a believer in nothing, he must grapple with a set of definitions which, as a Memorialist, he must correct as being at best inadequate and at worst totally erroneous. He may, if he is lucky, be asked if there is a name (other than nihilism) to be given to his mode of belief. Since the ideas contained under the title of



this book are still unknown to most persons, an answer of “Memorialism” will so mystify them as to demand further elucidation. Giving a name to the belief would be unnecessary if humanity were not so fond of creating categories and labels for things, but since they are, it is a dubious convenience that we can call ourselves Memorialists. “Yes,” we can say, “the Memorialist believes in death, but not in the sense of being a strictly negative aspect of nature by which all living things meet their end. He believes in death as being a positive force that surrounds all life and is inherent to and innate within all life, helping man to a complete degree of self-consciousness which, without the belief in death, would be unavailable to him.”

How unavailable? Why unavailable? Because trying to achieve complete self-consciousness only through a consciousness of life, or of oneself as alive, is like trying to understand the purpose of a pencil that has no point and no eraser. It is like being dropped down a pitch-black oubliette and asked to describe the castle that encases it. Memorialism gives us the ability to examine life inside *and* out—hence to get a fuller grasp of it than that ever achieved by any other animal, plant, or uncritical person. Most living persons observe themselves *only* as living persons. They take little to no account of the countless deaths that preceded and allowed for their being, nor the dying that is already taking place within them and has been since before birth, nor the death that will be theirs and could *already* be theirs—even before the fact of their actual biological demise—were they to devote themselves to finding it. This limited sense of being is, the Memorialist asserts, the basis of all thoughtless and immoral action. It is what allows us to misuse and discount other people, to abuse and debase ourselves, and to make choices that will have harmful repercussions beyond our own cognizance or control.

Life, as a raw force, is by nature reckless and irresponsible. See how the fungus in a body of water proliferates until it chokes out every other living thing therein. See how bacteria spread

through their host until it perishes and can no longer sustain them. See how the most persistent purveyors of new human lives are those classes of person who are least able to supply for them without reliance upon charity.<sup>2</sup> Life itself does not and cannot take death into consideration, but the *living* can, and it is by continuously cultivating and progressing in this consideration and consciousness of death, this *ultimate concern*, as metaphysicians are right to call it, that *the living outlive life*.

Contrary to the nihilist, who believes in the tearing-down of everything including “traditional” morality, the Memorialist, by calling himself a Memorialist, is making a moral stand—a stand against every instance in which the blind will of life and the living goes too far, takes too much, forces death's hand as an unavoidable countermeasure. The invention of the automobile, to take an example, has been heralded as epochal in nature, the greatest contribution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the life and future of humankind (other than the capacity to annihilate all human life in the course of a single war), and a testament to human ingenuity and our defiance of technological and geographical limitations. But because of this apparently brilliant and benevolent invention, a million new inconveniences and outright travesties have arisen to take the place of these so-called “limitations.” The earth is a filthier, less habitable, and more disgusting place. Highways have taken the place of vineyards and cornrows. Untold thousands are maimed and killed on the roads every day. The pace of life has increased exponentially, to the point that we demand as much speed as possible from everything from our microwave meals to our microprocessors. Once-compact and self-contained cities have given way to hideous and demoralizing urban sprawl. Families are fractured, each unit living thousands of miles away from

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<sup>2</sup> This observation is not intended as Malthusian alarmism or some veiled defense of eugenics, forced sterilization, or anything of the kind. Anyone can see that there are greater numbers of poor than there are of the rich, well-to-do, or even moderately self-sufficient. As the evils of society increase, this discrepancy grows ever greater, and yet the poor will not on that account (nor should they) voluntarily relinquish their biological prerogative to mate and reproduce.

its kindred. Whole tracts of commercial space, vital to the unhappy lives of those who rely upon the commerce done there, are absolutely impossible for the pedestrian to safely traverse. Regional cultures have been obliterated and homogenized beyond recognition and beyond forgiveness. The social cohesiveness of most communities is nonexistent; neighbors are not neighbors because they have cars, and drive long distances to see the persons with whom they prefer to socialize. Local churches are boarded and abandoned because congregants are driving to stadium-sized megachurches with acres of parking lots, to participate in a pandemonious parody of religion. Practically everybody we know spends hours a day in traffic to go to and return from jobs that have no visible or tangible relevance to themselves or anyone they care about. In order to survive, families must either spend nearly all the money they have on owning and maintaining a car, or move to urban centers where life is cramped, noisy, and rancid. Our basic experience of life is fundamentally and almost inescapably detestable, wretched, and joyless, compared to what it was before the advent of the car—when life was so much “less easy” and so much “slower.” The automobile is only one of numberless examples of life—the impulse to “live more” and “get more from life”—gone tragically, monstrously wrong.

The vitacentrist will contend that the Memorialist is “anti-progress.” “He doesn't want things to get better,” the vitacentrist will say of the Memorialist. But being able to recognize, appreciate, and maintain a healthy abhorrence of innovations that devalue and derail those small things that make life “worth living” is just one little part of what makes a Memorialist somewhat more conscious, somewhat more circumspect, somewhat less potentially destructive and self-destructive than the average, “go-along-to-get-along” member of society. Finding *the death that is your own* means thinking things out, pondering them through, seeing things to the end with all their possible contingencies, complications, and consequences. *The death that is your own* is not

(necessarily) the when and how of one's death; it is the capacity to place the moment of your death always and everywhere in the *present* moment, and follow everything backwards from there, deep into everything one does, everything one says, every moment one lives, always leaning into death, depending on it as the central pillar and nexus of a fully rounded and fully grounded perspective. The vitacentrist, falling into despair and contemplating (perhaps for the first time) his own death, is quite likely to say, "Since I'm going to die anyway, nothing really matters, there is no real truth." It is for the Memorialist to look at everything in the shadow of *the death that is his own* and say, "Because death is, and because I am death, all things matter, all things are true." Death confirms and consecrates reality. It is reality's cornerstone and its cupola. No one is real until his death is real to himself.

The aversion to and suspicion of superfluous technology (and most technology is, by nature, superfluous) is only a very marginal part of the Memorialist's makeup and the general schema of Memorliasm itself. But it is indicative of our concern with morality and the things that, by their use, make us immoral. The vitacentrist will vociferate, "Memorialists want everyone to die!" But this is simply not true. The Memorialist wants no one to die without first finding and coming to love *the death that is their own*. That everyone *will* die and *must* die goes without saying. What matters is what we make of this fact once we have the courage to apply it solely and fearlessly to ourselves. We are not nihilists; we do not want to tear everything down. We want to look at what we have built and be able to ask if it is really any good or not. We want to look at what we are building, and what is being built around us, and be able to ask whether it is making anything better, whether it is at all correcting the monstrosities and enormities that have been built already. We want to examine the materials that we are building with and be able to ask whether they are competent to the task of making anything other than the waste and ruin that already

surrounds us. To be a Memorialist one must have the moral courage and integrity to be *positively negative*, to often say “no” when life always says “yes,” and to often say “STOP” when life always shouts “GO!” The trouble with life, as such, is that it never sees death coming. Death, on the other hand, *always* sees life coming, because where life is going, death is already there. To be “already there” with death is a Memorialist's sole purpose, aim, and desire.

When the Memorialist answers the query, “What do you believe in,” with “I believe in death,” he is merely stating that outside of death, life holds no meaning; without death, there is nothing to believe in. While the vitacentrist fancies a world in which death no longer wears the diadem, in which nothing and no one has to die, the Memorialist sees that such a fantasy is in fact a nightmare—a vision of vacant, hollow meaninglessness. Life without end: *that* is the true despair. What is a journey without a destination, a voyage without a shore, a hallway with no exit, a prison sentence with no hope of release or even execution? It is despair, plain despair, and the Memorialist believes in death and loves death because he has known and felt that despair, has seen life spread endlessly and grotesquely around and before him and cried, “Wherefore this awful profusion? Wherefore this horrible masticating of mouths, these torrents of tears, the bewildered wailing of babes born to misery?” Morality demands such a question. If all we do and all we can do is “row, row, row our boats,” then what is death but our port and our anchor? If “life is but a dream,” what is death but the awakening? There is more truth in the songs we sing to our children than in the fallacies we tell to ourselves. Morality demands that we not only row our own boats, but that we know where we are rowing them to. Morality demands that we not only partake in the the dream but that we prepare ourselves for our arousal, our return to what is real.

Morality demands Memorialism!

## CHAPTER FIVE: MEMORIALISM AND SUICIDE

The Memorialist says that he holds death supreme above all things, proclaiming it to be his first and final concern. More than this, he has devoted himself to the contemplation of his *own* death, the death that he alone can die. It has been said before by a philosopher familiar to us all that philosophy is the study of death; and then, by a later philosopher, perhaps no less well-known, that the only philosophical question truly worth considering is that of suicide—whether or not life is truly worth living, or whether it is best to submit at once to the ineluctable finality of death: the simplest possible solution to the infinitely complex problem of life. It has already been stated in this book that all that matters in life matters only *because death is*, and because we are living our own deaths in every moment, striving to extract from every moment the substance that will make *our own deaths* real and meaningful to us. This may easily be misinterpreted as an edict to live life furiously, pursuing with the ardor of a zealot every end and design that could possibly qualify our lives, at the point of death, as having been “well-lived” and generously spent. Let this be the place where such prosaic misapprehensions are laid to rest, lest Memorialism itself lose all meaning in a world where practically any activity—anything other than a state of idleness and indecision—is qualified as being inherently meaningful and essentially good. There is only one good, and that is the good that is done on behalf of death within a society that reflexively associates death with evil. Anyone who protests against death *because* it is death is protesting against himself and the death that is within him. Anyone who protests against life because it is *nothing but life*, lived for the sake of living, is a friend of death and will be gratefully received at the terminus of his trek. Better yet, he will be the grateful recipient of *the death that is his own*.

The undeniable logic behind Memorialism is that, by allowing death to be the greatest and

most desirable of all things, it is giving absolute greatness and total desirability to that which is already ours, and will be ours whether or not we choose to take personal possession of it. The question that suicide—the very possibility of suicide—appears to pose is whether one should take death unto oneself through voluntary action or wait until death takes one unto itself through accident, disease, or the hand of another. Our present purpose here is to show that what we conceive as the choice of choices—the conundrum posed by a half-mad Hamlet—is indeed no choice at all, at least not for the Memorialist. Once one has chosen death and become death's chosen, there is no such thing as “right” death or “wrong” death: there is only death, not as an option, not as a thing richly postulated but yet to be obtained, but as an ever-present, ever-active and ever self-actualizing reality, all-encompassing and indwelling, and—for the individual now set apart from all others--soundly remote from considerations of morality or justice. Only when considered as an abstract universality is death subject to the standards of morality and justice which operate upon society and allow society to operate peacefully. One's own death—the death that is yours and yours alone—neither requires nor concedes to those conditions that apply only to the social order, to the common lot of men. It is, in all literalness, transcendent.

As a confessed and vocal Memorialist, one will come to expect from chiding vitacentrists such puerile (and intentionally rhetorical, or apparently unanswerable) statements as, “If death is really all you believe in, why don't you just kill yourself now? What on earth are you waiting for?” The primitive perceptions with which the vitacentrist are equipped are basically binary in nature: life is life, death is death, and the latter is the enemy of the former. While one is alive (the vitacentrist says) one thinks about life and *only* about life—how to keep it, how to prolong it, how to advance and promote it. He has the superstitious idea that thinking about death will somehow attract or initiate one's doom, that death is a thing never to be invoked, lest it be inadvertently

summoned to steal among the living and stalk them to their graves. Absurd as it sounds, there is, even in this ludicrous notion, just a pinch of truth. For once the burgeoning Memorialist has thought about death—his own death and no one else's—there is indeed no turning back for him, no blithe and oblivious retreat back to regular life. No one looks in the mirror and sees death staring back without being permanently changed, and, as far as the vitacentrist is concerned, permanently contaminated. The only thing a vitacentrist fears more than death is the specter—so prominent in the fictions consumed by popular society—of the already-dead continuing to move and operate among the living, freeing death from its isolation and its sequestration among the tombs and the mausoleums, and bringing it where it can only be alien, abhorrent, and morbidly incongruous. Thus, by saying, “Why don't you just kill yourself and get it over with,” the vitacentrist is really only asking you to go away and never come back, to realize the physical death with the contemplation of which you have corrupted yourself and so remove it from his awareness, so that he can go on living in the ignorance to which he is accustomed. And of course, it is also a taunt, which seems to beg the question, “Do you really have the guts to go through with it?” This even if, in announcing your belief in death, no mention of suicide or the personal prospect thereof was ever made.

It may well be that persons who have themselves considered suicide as a prospect or possibility will be more likely to understand Memorialism and accept it on an intuitive level. They have, simply by entertaining the thought, passed the point of no return and seen death's face in their mirrors. That does not mean, however, that someone who, in the delirium of despondency or seemingly hemmed in by nothing but encroaching horrors, cannot recover from the brink of self-annihilation and return to thinking and acting precisely as every other vitacentrist does, perhaps even with a newly reinforced resolve to deny death in all its guises. A momentary glimpse of



individual dissolution may terrify a person, unwilling to peak over life's precipice, into an almost obsessive refusal to hear death mentioned or to speak its name. It is common enough for anyone to say, "I felt so bad that I wanted to die," but like all such expressions, this has become so routine and conventional a point of hyperbole that both speaker and listener let it pass without taking any notice of its literal significance. It is probable, though impossible to prove, that more persons have—in a passionate instant, passing as soon as it came—considered killing someone else than have considered killing themselves. That is life's way. It would rather take than be taken. The reason suicide remains so secretive, so scandalous, so thoroughly strange a subject in society is that so few really take it seriously until someone they know actually carries it through. Even then, it becomes, for those left standing in the wake of the act, a matter of utter befuddlement and impenetrable mystery, which no amount of explanation or forewarning on the suicide's part can make sensible. The suicide does not merely extract himself from life, he *estranges himself from the living*. In the opinions of many, if not most, suicide is a sin surpassing that of murder. To kill another person, they say, is to strike a blow to the face of humanity; but to kill oneself—*that* is to spit in the face of God, the giver of life.

Let us, for the sake of thoroughness, list the principal reasons why a person would generally consider taking his own life:

1. A seemingly inescapable set of damning circumstances portending to certain ruin;
2. The suffering of a loss so unendurable as to remove from life all possibility of meaning;
3. The ineluctable certainty of living in a condition so far reduced or embarrassed as to be personally impossible, including grievous injury to one's physical body or personal dignity;

4. A gradual accretion of private catastrophes suggesting a future defined by perpetual failure;
5. A sense of personal worthlessness impervious to the dissuasions of reason or external proofs;
6. A sense that one is insufficiently appreciated by others, the affects of whose apathy can only be demonstrated, by way of revenge, through suicide;
7. An unshakable conviction that the world to come is (or must be) preferable to that of the living;
8. A terminal malady of the mind compelling the individual to destruction.

The mistake most to be avoided in the examination of each of these pretenses is the assumption that all of them—or any of them—are associated by the common quantity of *hopelessness*, with hope being held as the quality most essential to life. Such an assumption presupposes that everyone who has not killed himself is to some extent an optimist, believing, however feebly, that things will either stay as good as they already are, or become still better, or could at least not get any worse. Yet there are, living and striving throughout humanity's ranks, a great number of persons who are expressly and demonstrably pessimistic—even apocalyptic—in their thinking, but who nevertheless balk or tremble at the idea of killing themselves. For them, no matter how pointless and unsatisfactory life is or might become, death is even more pointless and unsatisfactory still. For them, even death is an ambition unworthy of exerting themselves toward. If such a one is suddenly gripped by a suicidal fervor, it is because, contrary to his character, he has finally found *hope* in something, and that something is death. It is the only thing he has to look forward to and he is all at once impatient to obtain it. Thus, suicide could be as readily an

indication of the gaining of hope in a heretofore hopeless person as the suspension of hope in a previously hopeful person.

Just as there is no personality typical to the suicide, who finds his answers and solutions in death, there is likewise no personality typical to the Memorialist, who also finds his answers and solutions in death. Why, then, as the mocking vitacentrist proposes, do not all Memorialists commit suicide?

In a way, all Memorialists *do* commit suicide, in that they voluntarily exempt themselves from the world as defined and perpetuated by vitacentrists, in which consumption and the pursuit of trivial pleasures are life's only aims. Because the Memorialist knows death to be already ever-present and ever-active within himself, the necessity for going out and finding death by enacting it physically upon the self is somewhat superfluous. For the Memorialist, biological death is only the consummation and confirmation of a death that already took place when vitacentrism was renounced. It can happen at any time and in any way; it makes no difference to the Memorialist how and when he dies. It is not a condition of his being what he is because death is, in itself, *unconditional*. It has happened, does happen, and will always happen to all persons, at all times, and in all places. Is a Memorialist then forbidden to commit suicide? Definitely not. Remember, for the Memorialist, there is no “wrong” way to die. No death is either forbidden to or required of the suicide, except, in the latter case, *the death that is his own*, which, ideally, has been his own long before the point of literal, physical dissolution.

All suicides are to some degree Memorialist in nature, because they entail the suicide's choosing his own death, which is what a Memorialist does every day of his life. This is not a defense of suicide, a sanctification of suicide, or an excusing of suicide—at least not in every instance. Indeed, a suicide that needs an excuse is, to the Memorialist point of view, an inferior

and perhaps even immoral suicide. He is not a Memorialist who attaches to his death any reason, motive, or premise. In dying, the Memorialist does only what was required of all of us at the moment of our conceptions. What the Memorialist does in adopting his creed, however, is to turn what was once a senseless and hateful imposition of nature into a self-ennobling and self-affirming *duty*, and yes, a positive joy.

For the one who is reading this, who has been subjected to the loss of a person close to them by suicide, do not suppose that the author is without all possible sympathy for both you and the person thus lost. The reason why death must be internalized and personalized in order to be addressed sensibly is that, for the living, for those caught up in the tempest of life without the relief and clarity offered by Memorialism, *death can never make sense*; it can never be reasoned with or reasoned about. Even the assassin, with his hands still bloody from his crime, stands helpless in the face of the death that he has himself just caused. Even the judge, with his mallet on the gavel, has no conception of the infinite mystery of death that he has just levied upon the assassin brought before him. No one, including the suicide, is master of death, but all are mastered by it. It is in mastering oneself so as to accept and adore the insurmountable supremacy of death that one becomes a Memorialist. The Memorialist grieves for the death of a suicide, just as he would any other death, just as anybody would any other death. He is not immune to the incomprehensible pain created by another's passing. The Memorialist strives to understand his *own* death only; he is not asked to, nor is he superhumanly capable of, understanding the death of anyone else.

For the reader who has at one time or is currently considering death by suicide, let it be known that he will not find in these pages a license or a source of encouragement toward such an end. Both suicides and non-suicides alike may seek to minimize the act by calling it the “easy way out” of life's problems, never considering how much more difficult it may make life for those left in

its wake, or how it may indirectly serve to inhibit them in making sense of their own deaths.

Nothing about being a Memorialist is easy; finding rest and reassurance in the knowledge of death does not guarantee that one's death will be peaceful. As a Memorialist, you must venture again into the world and know what it is for the world to be against you, for all that you say and all that you are to be derided as heresy, lunacy, and dangerous foolishness. The Memorialist who commits suicide risks more than being dismissed as someone who simply couldn't withstand the trials inherent to his calling; he risks defaming and stigmatizing all Memorialists as crackpots and desperate radicals, and Memorialism itself as poisonous and obscene. Finding *the death that is your own* should not under any circumstances entail ruining the lives of others, causing them irreparable emotional damage, or contributing to their hardships in any way. Memorialism is *only* about finding peace for yourself and for everyone around you.

Of all the things that make humankind unique and complex among living beings, suicide stands alone as the most significantly and singularly human of all actions. No other creature known to man accepts death willingly or brings it upon itself purposely. As a thing set apart and distinct to humanity, suicide will always be sacred, always beyond the ken of casual discussion and informal examination. The vitacentrist may treat suicide lightly because he knows nothing of death and has not submitted to the rigors of making it personal to himself. This is not, cannot, and must not be true of the Memorialist. For the Memorialist, every death is *his* death, every suicide *his* suicide. It is one more crucial and irreducible penetration into the Ultimate Mystery that, with every death, renders itself only more impenetrable, up to and especially including *the death that is one's own*.

## CHAPTER SIX: MEMORIALISM AND MATERIAL PROGRESS

The problem of the modern-day vitacentrist is not his basic love of life, which is intrinsic to nearly all conscious and semi-conscious living things, but his definition—or rather, redefinition—of life as something other than what it really is. Avoiding for the moment all arguments, religious or scientific, regarding the ultimate origins of the races now comprising what we call humanity, both science and what exists of history have shown that the only reason you and I exist now—you to read what I am writing, and I to write it—is that our ancestors stretching back past the point of record or recognition were willing to and capable of enduring an existence of unmitigated toil, privation, and suffering for long enough to produce offspring who were, in their turn, equally willing to and capable of enduring and overcoming the same. In this way, they were only acting according to the natures bestowed on them by the life-force itself, and in imitation of the Nature they operated within and upon in order to survive. For the fact is (and, perhaps now to a lessened or at least altered degree) that the principal way in which life functions, continues, and operates—in man as in all Nature—is in a state of nearly perpetual struggle. Without giving undue credence to Darwinian and post-Darwinian opinions on the matter, it can without risk of contradiction be said that it is only through sustained and multifarious forms of continuous struggle that human life has endured up to the present moment, and that if all things had come easily to it from the start, human life would have either ceased to exist long ago, or continued to exist in a radically different—most likely comparatively primitive—form. Everything we now perceive as having represented an advance in human progress, from the making of stone tools, to the creation of language, to the introduction of machines into common life, has been the result of an intelligent and concentrated response to either the hardships imposed on us by Nature (in the form of procuring food, shelter, clothing, etc.) or the hardships imposed on us by ourselves (primarily in the

form of war.) It is these advancements, which have generally altered rather than eliminated the difficulties inherent to existence, which in our age have come to be nefariously labeled as “conveniences;” and it is the modern preoccupation with the accumulation and production of “conveniences” which makes life today so little worth living, and forms the foundation of the vitacentrist delusion. The modern vitacentrist either cannot recognize or will not acknowledge that the world has become ugly, crowded, sickly, noisy, and boring because of the centuries humanity has spent endeavoring to make life easy for itself with the creation and proliferation of “conveniences.”

One is always fighting an uphill battle when attempting to elucidate the perils of a technologically-based society. For every detriment or detraction the so-called Luddite proposes as a result of the industrial and technological revolutions that have shaped and contorted our present world, the technologist, industrialist, and vitacentrist counter with some apparent boon or benefit to society and the individual which is more often than not concerned with a) ease of living, b) superabundance of necessary and unnecessary products and resources, and c) the promotion of life, health, and natural or unnatural longevity. The Luddite argument is a hard one to make in a room full of people who want, above all and despite all, to enjoy more leisure (whether or not they know what to do with it), possess more (whether or not they know where to put it), and live longer (whether or not they have a good and defensible reason to.) The vitacentrists are, after all, only responding to the desires and appetites of the unconscious, unreasoning life-force that is innate within them. All moving objects seek repose; all who have anything wish to have more; all living things want to live forever. It is the task of the Memorialist (and really, all rational and philosophical persons) to examine these unconscious, unreasoning desires and appetites in a conscious and reasonable way. Until this is done, we will never make sense of or peace with death,

and especially never with the *deaths that are our own*.

In taking issue with the Leviathan-like role technology and large industry has come to assume (or rather, be given) in our society, the Memorialist should not necessarily be understood as averring that humanity's doom was sealed the moment he took a chunk of flint and fashioned it into a hand-tool. Nature imbued the *homo sapien* with the intelligence and craftiness by which it earned its scientific name, and—so far as Nature can intend anything—intended them to supply the species with the wherewithal to persist in different environments and compensate for what physical deficiencies it had acquired in the process of becoming human (i.e., the loss of fur, lack of speed, the awkwardness of bipedal ambulation, etc.) That humanity would have survived—albeit on a much-reduced scale—without such innovations is almost without doubt, but it surely would not have flourished as it did through ice-ages and droughts, floods and migrations, sea-changes both astrological and ecological, making its variegated homes and planting its idiosyncratic settlements in the unlikeliest of climes and the most inhospitable hemispheres. Humanity in most parts of the world has been indistinguishable from the technologies it has employed, so reliant has it been upon that which it has taken from Nature for the subduing thereof. Always it has been the maintenance of balance in the *degree* of reliance upon such technologies that has made all the difference between a society of survivors and a society of slaves, held captive by its ingenious—but ultimately enervating—contrivances. Our present-day capacity and compulsion to turn everything into and over to the technologies we invent has rendered us as helpless over them as King Midas was to his god-given gift of instantaneous transmutation. Now we see that no sooner is a child born to us than he is surrendered like a sacrifice to the machines in the hospital, the machines in our homes, the machines in our schools, and the machines in our places of occupation. These machines, being inanimate, and being inextricable to ourselves, promote in us an indirect misapprehension of our



own boundlessness and immortality. Because they do not live, we are all too apt to forget that we will die. Indeed, many of us have put our unswerving faith in technology as being the means by which we will finally be made physically immortal. In an age in which it is the machines making the machines, we look forward like a flock of wide-eyed millennialists to the day when the machines will remake us in their own image, and we make them in ours.

Laying the hysterics of science-fiction (a term one fears will soon be obsolete), the Memorialist is concerned not only with the pernicious hope that technology will somehow eliminate the necessity for individual death, but with the way in which technology makes the lives *contained* by the prospect of death less a struggle for life itself, and more a struggle for meaning, identity, and relevance in the context of an existence spent in seamless lock-step with the marching of the machines, our gods and masters. At nearly any other point previous to the last three centuries, Memorialism as a philosophy and worldview would have in one sense accorded rather neatly with the notion of reality already held by the commonality of persons, and in another sense would have almost been reduced to superfluity by the prosaic nature of death, which was already omnipresent and ever-visible. Constant labor, toil, uncertainty and suffering was the basic experience of nearly every living person, by whom death as the representation of eventual cessation and eternal rest was *both* welcomed and deplored, *both* celebrated and lamented. Our relationship with death was wholly natural and uninterrupted by the modern-day fantasy that whatever death has devised for us, there is a machine or a chemical that can send it scurrying back to the caves and wildernesses where we first came to recognize and revere it.

The reader is not to suppose, however, that Memorialism is reducible to a philosophy of nostalgia. It is that, perhaps, to the extent that Confucianism is a philosophy of nostalgia, or Platonism, or Ghandiism. Memorialism does not wish to see people's lives made miserable by the

reduction of civilization to a primitive and desperate state. But in the same way that one is wholly and singularly responsible for coming to confront, engage, and identify with *the death that is his own*, one must likewise take a full and earnest accounting of the life that one has now, and what one can do within that life to make one's death something other than pointless, ghastly, and incomprehensible. And that can only be done by looking at all that one does, and all that one has, and all that one currently thinks one needs in order to make life “livable,” and ask oneself the all-important, all-encompassing question, “What is there of this that will mean anything at all to me at the moment of my death?” Like the Pharaoh buried with his chariots and the Viking buried with his sword, he must look at his computer, and his mobile phone, and his myriad gadgets, and his investment portfolio, and his home entertainment system, and all that he has sacrificed hours, days, and years of his life to accumulate for the mere purpose of “keeping up with the times,” and ask himself what it is worth to him as he teeters on the verge of entering into timelessness. The foremost difference between the Memorialist and the vitacentrist is that the Memorialist sees everything within the context of eternity, whereas the vitacentrist sees everything either within the context of the moment, which is over as soon as it comes, or the “future,” which is limited by the unknowable and may never come at all. The Memorialist fears death less because he is already, to as great an extent as he can presently manage and ultimately aspire, living in timelessness.

It is simple, of course, to disparage as—at best—frivolous and—at worst—deleterious technologies that are chiefly meant for our diversion, distraction, non-vital communication, vanity, etc., but far less so to call into question the technologies that sustain our civilization in its present form, and provide nearly all of us who are fortunate enough to be employed with our subsistence and livelihood. How, it is reasonable to ask, can a Memorialist profess what he does while spending most of his waking life entering figures into a computer or operating machines in a manufacturing

plant? There is a pleasing naivete to this question, and the Memorialist is commended who dares to ask it of himself. Yet one of the things that makes the life of the individual interesting and worthy of both examination in the form of self-reflection and preservation in the form of posterity, is that he had no choice as to the place, time, or circumstances into which he was born, and must strive to become to the greatest possible degree comfortable with himself and the fact of his own death within and in spite of the conditions imposed upon him by history, geography, and society. We are all, whether we wish to be or not, the products of our times. How significantly we conform to or diverge from the beliefs and practices most commonly held by those around us relies, among other things, upon education, disposition, upbringing, location, inborn perspicacity, and so on, but it is a blundering misuse of the language to say that any person is “behind the times” or “ahead of his times.” The present moment is sufficiently capacious to contain the whole of the past that has preceded it and all the possibilities of everything to come. From these the individual accepts those elements that best accommodate his idea of himself and the world as he would like it to be. If the manuscript of this book were to have been written on strips of velum or an old manual typewriter (which it wasn't), it would not be because the author was not a full and active participant of his own times, but because something inherent in the velum or the typewriter seemed more comfortable to him or more conducive to the writing itself. This book, despite its sometimes retrospective character, still written by a child of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, for the children of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, who alone can understand it in a light that would be imponderable to the children of previous ages, and either incomprehensible or archaic to members of ages to come. It may not, for all the author knows, even be read by anybody in his own age, much less future ages. All the author can do is write; this alone was given to him.

We live now in an age in which the avoidance or eschewing of technology (that is, modern

electrical and digital technology) is practically impossible and even in some ways illegal. It may be that there is no work left to be had that does not involve the constant use of computers or machines controlled by computers (including automobiles, without which life for many would be untenable.) It may be that one wishes to enter a profession (doctor, farmer, accountant, lawyer, delicatessen operator, pharmacist, librarian--practically anything other than bricklayer or pan-handler) that has to some extent or another been thoroughly infiltrated by technologies, within technologies, within technologies, the learning and re-learning of which must become a lifelong prospect if one is to survive and do well. Nevertheless one has seen for oneself the lunacy of denying and evading death in fact and principle, and found in Memorialism the truths that can alone deliver one from error and fear. The Memorialist is no more to despair of this than the devout Christian is to despair of the fact that Jesus was never recorded to have eaten chicken, or the Marxist that his philosopher did not anticipate the ascension of the transcontinental corporation. Everyone must adjust his expectations of himself according to the practical realities of his age, removing from himself all that is inessential and cumbersome, and retaining only that which keeps him from becoming a hindrance to himself and his fellowman. The Memorialist is under no obligation to live in a shed with a wood-stove and an outhouse, although some of us might think this an agreeable notion. That is not the kind of nature the Memorialist is interested in returning to. Rather, it is his own inner nature, which knows that he will die, and never stops asking what that single, unavoidable, absolute, and all-important fact means to him as an individual and a participant in human life, human affairs, and human history.

## TWENTY TENETS OF MEMORIALISM

*Memorialism is nothing more or less than the belief in death as the beginning and end of all things human, in the contemplation and veneration thereof all meaning is to be found. Our foremost tenets are:*

- I. We seek always, everywhere, and in everything *the Death that is Our Own*, and regard all other death or deaths only inasmuch as they are relevant to this Primary and Ultimate Concern.
- II. We acknowledge the discovery of death to be the dawn of human self-consciousness and spiritual understanding.
- III. We understand death to be the absolute limit of human knowledge, beyond which we can neither speculate nor postulate any further.
- IV. We neither insist upon nor attempt to define a belief in any form of continued existence after death. Those of us who hold to such a belief are free to conceive of this existence in whatever way they are individually inclined.
- V. We keep death as our constant companion, which is able to claim us physically at any time. Our lives are a debt owed to death.
- VI. We hold death in awe, reverence, and veneration, and not in fear, as being the origin and end of all mysteries.
- VII. We perceive that all life consists of little more than varying degrees and types of suffering, and look to death as our deliverer therefrom.
- VIII. We believe each development in civilization *intended for the pleasure or leisure (and not the edification) of men, or to unduly ease the lot of the living* to have carried us farther from our primal relationship with death, and therefore worthy of wariness and possible repudiation.
- IX. We perceive other human beings not as competitors or obstacles, but as fellow-sufferers, struggling on their own journeys to death.
- X. Knowing our own suffering, we attempt to ease and ameliorate all unnecessary suffering, within our own capacities, wherever we see it.
- XI. While we may, in coming to understand our own deaths, work toward establishing a posterity, we live as much as possible as if death could come for us at any moment, and do not *count on* a future of any duration.
- XII. We proclaim Memorialism, in its rudimentary form, to be universal, non-regional, all-inclusive, and antecedent to all other beliefs.
- XIII. We condemn the malicious taking of any human life other than our own, neither prohibiting nor explicitly or implicitly encouraging suicide.
- XIV. We believe in dying at the time dictated by nature or circumstance and accept that death may come as a result of our own habits and life-choices.
- XV. We allow others their own beliefs, knowing that each is simply a different attempt to face the fact of death.
- XVI. Like death itself, we make no distinctions between persons, whether in wealth, social rank, race, creed, or otherwise, acknowledging no hierarchy nor any order of prestige among ourselves.
- XVII. Those of us who pray direct our prayers to death as being the ultimate, mysterious, unifying force in our physical and metaphysical universe.
- XVIII. We do not pray for the deaths of others.
- XIX. We do not pray for our own deaths, but await them with patience and reverence.
- XX. We take as little interest in the things of this world—wars, politics, economics, private feuds, etc.--as our circumstances will excuse, instead focusing on the continuous contemplation of *the Death that is Our Own*.

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